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ABSTRACT

Selected findings are presented from a qualitative, observational study of the relationship between a choice time event and literacy learning in an urban public school's kindergarten in California. The complicated interplay between the overall structure of an event and the small ways one teacher daily framed and guided children's participation in the social and academic ways of their kindergarten classroom was examined. Choice time was composed of two different activity times, "activity time" and "small-group time." The teacher framed these times by announcing them. This gives the children an overall skeletal outline for the activity period. Multiple-choice making and free-flowing activity areas were aspects of these times that the teacher promoted to permit second and third choices if space or materials were not available for the first-choice activity. Activity framing by the teacher offered a range of activity choices and emphasized certain aspects of literacy activities. Students were encouraged to make a real choice of activity, but the activities often focused on literacy, and framing by the teacher often enriched the choice-making opportunities. (Contains 23 references.) (SLD)

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CHOICE TIME AND ACTIVITY FRAMING

The first is the children's interest in each other. It plays the very devil with the orthodox method. If only they'd stop talking to each other, playing with each other, fighting with each other and loving each other. This unseemly and unlawful communication! In self-defence I've got to use the damn thing. So I harness the communication, since I can't control it, and base my method on it.

Sylvia Ashton-Warner — *Teacher*

* * *

Introduction

Just as Ashton-Warner declined to fight the inclination of young children to talk and interact, so too did the teacher in this study, Helen, shape the social and academic fabric of her classroom to "harness" this "communication." For Helen, the choice time event was a major way to accomplish this and other social and curricular goals. In this paper, I present selected findings from a qualitative, observational study of the relationship between the choice time event and literacy learning in an urban, public school kindergarten classroom in California.

The theoretical framework I have adopted for my study views social interaction and language and literacy learning as intimately intertwined (Hymes, 1972; Mishler, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978; Heath, 1983; Dyson, 1989, 1993). In schools, this relationship comes together in powerful ways — children must recognize the sometimes mystifying structures and social patterns of lessons and events in order to participate successfully in the academic and social worlds of the classroom (Mehan, 1972; Cazden, 1988;

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Rubin, 1990; Barnes, 1990). One such important event in primary classrooms is the free or choice time event. In respect to current research, we have a beginning picture of some of the academic and social demands of this activity time. For instance, certain major research studies on free choice time and young children have looked at friendship patterns and the role of routines in the peer culture of preschoolers (Corsaro, 1985), opportunities for displaying communicative competence (Carrasco, 1981), and the role of gender in children's free play (Paley, 1984; Goodenough, 1987).

My study adds to the picture of about the social and academic demands of a free choice event by examining the complicated interplay between the overall structure of an event and the small, daily ways one teacher framed and guided children's participation in both the social and academic ways of a kindergarten classroom. In this paper, I look at the basic structure of choice time and the role that certain routines played in framing the children's social and academic participation in choice time. As I examine the underlying structure of choice time, I focus on the event's 'participation parameters' and 'permeable boundaries.' As I look at the routines Helen used, I highlight the role that the 'activity framing' routine played in guiding children's literacy work. In gathering the data, I was guided by the following research questions: a) What were the basic ways choice time was organized? b) How did the activity framing constitute a routine? c) How did the activity framing guide children's participation in literacy-related activities? In answering these questions, I touch on these themes: a) the relationship betweeen curricular organization and student choice b) the teacher's role in engaging children

in the expected ways of school and c) the importance of the teacher's guiding children in literacy activities across curricular areas.

Given this introduction to my theoretical framework, research questions, and themes, I now present my findings on the interrelationship between the choice time event and activity framing. I first discuss the overall organization of choice time, and highlight the basic structure of what Helen called "activity time" and "small group time," and then highlight the participation parameters and permeable boundaries of the event. In the second major section, I look at the relationship between activity framing and choice time by discussing the routine's purposes, parts and structure, specialized language, and elements varied.

Choice Time Organization

Choice time was composed of two different activity times which Helen called "activity time" and "small group time." Both activity times reflected Helen's emphasis on the value of student choice, a developmentally-based curriculum, and young children talking and interacting as they work. In this section, I give an overview of the overall structure of choice time in Helen's classroom, and offer examples of basic ways she established the event. I first discuss the organization of 'activity time' and then 'small group time.' In doing so, I highlight the importance of the event's participation parameters and permeable boundaries.

Activity Time

Two significant aspects of activity time were daily opportunities to choose from the full range of activity choices in the classroom, and to talk and interact with peers as children participated in the activities. Activity time contained the basic or 'stock' range of activity choices that small

group time drew on. The children were free, in Helen's words, "to choose small group activities, as well as the range of manipulatives, art, and house." As discussed earlier, during the early part of the school year, Helen carefully balanced opportunities to make activity choices with the introduction of more and more activities. By late fall, Helen had used the activity framing to offer an extensive daily array of activity choices and materials which included: easel painting, drawing and cutting, free drawing, hollow wooden blocks, small wooden blocks, Unifix cubes, playdoh, pattern blocks, peg boards, puzzles, weaving (flat, finger, and straw), reading, play house, listening center, writing center books, wooden train tracks, and geoboards. In addition, children could select and participated in additional activity choices during a single activity or work time, and this increased the number of potential activity choices available to the children.

During activity time, while Helen monitored the overall running of the event and sometimes worked with individuals or small groups of children, much of the children's talk and interaction went on out of earshot of Helen. The event, therefore, was basically 'child-run.' A 'typical' activity time unfolded in this chronological order: Helen started the activity time with an activity framing wherein she listed activity choices and provided any special instructions, the children then selected their desired activity, they then worked alone or with peers and/or adults, and were free to change 'jobs' and select a new activity without Helen's permission.

For example, in one 'moment in time' (a quick snapshot) on February 25, the six focal children simultaneously participated in these different activities — Kimberly, a pattern block design on the rug; Julio,

flat weaving at a table; Lori, a story read by an adult; Dante, playdoh creations at a table; Andrew, the family in the house; Nicole, hollow blocks with two others on the rug. In another moment in time two weeks earlier on February 11, the focal children had also participated in a range of activities: Dante, Valentines making at the back table; Lori and Kimberly, drawing at the middle table with another girl; Nicole, hollow blocks; Julio and Andrew, plastic link chains on the rug with two other boys. And half an hour later on that day . . . Julio and Andrew and the other two boys all had a chain of links around their heads like headbands, and Nicole and Lori helped an adult pass out Valentines into a row of bags along the floor. This diversity of activity choices and social configurations typified the daily playing out of activity time in this classroom.

Small Group Time

"Small group time" was the second activity time under the overall umbrella of the choice time event. In Helen's words, small group time differed from activity time because it "usually occured first, before recess, and it was usually a little shorter in time (than activity time) and involved less movement" on the part of the children changing activity centers. It also targeted more of a 'traditional' kindergarten curriculum. Helen described small group time as "getting ready to read, write, do math and science." Small group time primarily occured in the mornings and involved "activities in language arts, math, science, and perceptual skills. It is not the full range of activities, and it takes time for the children to learn that they can't choose easel painting at that time, or they can't choose play at that time; there are specific activities they can choose at that time. It's somewhat limited."

In another important difference from activity time, small group time involved greater emphasis on adult assistance working with the children. For example, on May 5, Helen offered these choices: autobiographies with an adult, writing books, reading with an adult, coloring with an adult, pattern blocks, listening center, computer, weaving, Mother's Day presents to be wrapped, puzzles. On this occasion, Dante and Julio chose autobiographies; Andrew, the computer; and Kimberly, coloring and cutting out a mask.

In working with the children, the adults in the classroom — Helen, the instructional aide, and parent volunteers — usually played the role of helper or guide in working with individual or small groups of children during small group time. Rarely did I see children gather round Helen or another adult wherein the children sat and listened to 'direct instruction' on some topic or aspect of an activity. This form of 'whole group instruction' and teacher talk wherein Helen addressed the entire class on a certain social or academic concern, issue, or concept, primarily occured during Helen's daily activity framing routines which I discuss later in this paper. Rather, in terms of adult instruction and interaction during small group time, the doing of the activity itself was the center of the focus the children's focus as the adult involved assisted and helped.

In an example of using the whole class forum for 'direct instruction,' Helen usually introduced a new small group activity with the entire class before cycling the children through or offering it as a choice. She did this while the children were gathered around her on the rug. "I keep track during small group time because I want to make sure that every child has experienced things from the range of choices," Helen explained. "During the time when I have the full group, I'm introducing an activity

which I keep track of during the small group time because I want to make sure that every child has experienced things from the range of choices. So what happens is that during the time when I have the full group, I'm introducing an activity which I then may cycle into the small group activity choices. So if I introduce a new math game, and then I make it one of the choices at small group, this takes time to lead up to small group time because you need enough activities for the whole class that are all related. I always try to have more activities than I have children because I want even the last child to have a choice."

Helen limited participation in some small group activities. "I also plug in to small group time a rule that they're familiar with from the art activities: I would say about some of the activities, 'When it's your turn to do this activity, you may work here as long as you like, but when your turn is over, then please don't choose this again until everybody who has wanted a first turn has had one. Then you can come back for more turns.' I don't like to say to children, 'Make one picture and then it's somebody else's turn.'

Helen structured small group time to achieve a balance between allowing children to have choices while at the same time exposing them to the full spectrum of activities. Helen explained that cycling children through an activity "guarantees circulation, and so in the course of a week or ten days every child has been there. They can also go to more than one activity because the children are in developmentally different places; some of them need half an hour to reach some kind of closure, and other children will come to their limit in five minutes. So there have to be other additional alternatives."

Not only did the activities themselves vary, but so did the history of the children's involvement with the projects and the degree of adult assistance that was needed. For instance, children worked on independent activities like weaving, while other projects like making enamel medallions and writing autobiographies both required varying degrees and forms of adult assistance. Other ongoing projects evolved and changed over time, and Helen used the activity framing to give special instructions or information regarding a specific stage or element of the project. Helen cycled children through these activities, checking their names off the class list until the entire class completed the task. Although Helen wanted all children to participate eventually in these activities, Helen frequently offered these ongoing projects as yet another small group choice children could choose if they wished.

Participation Parameters

Three participation parameters in particular helped foster children's successful participation in choice. In keeping with previous work on participation and event structures (Mehan, 1972; Cazden, 1988; Rubin, 1990; Barnes, 1990), I define participation parameters as the basic, expected ways of behaving or participating within a classroom event structure. While these parameters were most often presented during Helen's activity framing routine, I discuss them in this first major section of the paper because of their relation to the basic structure of choice time.

The initial choice time designation was the first parameter Helen used. At the outset of each activity framing, Helen announced whether it was "activity time," "small group time," or whether she was "combining activity and small group time" into one choice time period. Over the course of the year, announcing the specific activity time at the outset of the

activity framing signalled, or became a code word, to the children that only certain kinds of activities would be offered as choices. In turn, this parameter functioned as an important frame of reference for the children; it gave the children an overall frame or skeletal outline for the activity period to come.

For instance, in a May 3 activity framing, Helen announced that is was "small group time and then listed some appropriate small group time choices. (Italics have been added to emphasize the importance of activity label as a signal to the children of the presence or absence of certain participation parameters).

Helen: Ok, let's see who's ready. Good. That's better. *During this small group time, some people may work on their stories* (i.e. their autobiographies to illustrate). Some people might work in their writing books. Some people might be part of the group working on their horses (for the upcoming all-school "Reading Roundup") and Mrs. M., will you please work at the table with the people who want to do their horses please? *And—*

Greg: Is this small group time?

Helen: Yes. Boys and girls, I want you to meet Irene. She's here today to keep us company for a while longer and Irene, would you read stories today? Ok, Irene will you read stories for people who want to hear more stories? Be sure you write down the name of the story so we can put it on your list (i.e. Reading Roundup list of books the children have 'read'). Some people might want to do pattern blocks. Some people might want to do the listening center. There's *one* person at the listening center (Helen had included a filmstrip at this center for the past few weeks). Two people might want to do computer. Some people might have weaving that's not finished that they might want to work on this morning. *Ok, think about where you're going to work.*

Jacqui: House?

Helen: No, it's not activity time. It's small group time. Some of you will be in the story group, the listening center, working on you book about yourself, at the writing table, doing pattern blocks, the letter puzzles. Think about which of these things you're going to do and we'll be ready to start.

George: Can we bowl today?

Helen: No, I don't think we can bowl today. We'll have to save bowling for another day. Think about—

George: This week?

Helen: We're not going to bowl today because while you're working, Michael (university tutor) is going to be working on enamelling today, and he will call you if it's your turn to make your Mother's Day present . . . Ok, everybody ready to start? Everybody ready for choice time? Think about what you're going to do today, and I have the name cards right here.

First, when Helen initially said, "during this small group time," this most likely signalled to the majority of the children that not only were they not having activity time, but that the upcoming choice time would only include the range of activities and social configurations found in small group time. As seen in this example, although the framing occured almost at the end of the school year, some children were confused about the overall parameter of the choice time; as five-year-olds are want to do, they all did not immediately 'get' the parameter.

The maximum number of children at a center or activity area formed the second participation parameter in choice time. Certain centers, activity areas, and materials had an official, established maximum number of child participants:

Activity/Material	Capacity
hollow blocks	4
solid blocks	2
easels	2
listening center	4
house	4
computers	2
writing center	4
free drawing table	4

Some areas like the writing center and round table had a consistent capacity due to a set number of chairs and size of the work space. Other areas like the library and rug, and certain materials like pattern blocks and puzzles, had more flexible or "open" capacities. This allowed for a more 'free-flowing' use of the areas and materials. For example, it was perfectly permissible for one, two, three, or even four children to work with pattern blocks on the rug at the same time. In addition, many activities requiring adult assistance, like illustrating the children's autobiographies, also did not have set capacities. These activities usually served several children, or the space around one large table area. Other activities like enamelling had a limit of one person due to the specific nature of the activity. While Helen trained the children to learn the capacities from the beginning of the school year, she continued to use the activity framing as a forum for reminding the children and informing them of any capacities for brand new or reintroduced activities.

The number of available activity choices formed the third parameter. The wide variety of potential activities meant that children rarely vied or competed for the same desired activity and/or peer partners. This contrasted to my other study (Meier, 1993) where in that kindergarten classroom there was a premium placed during choice time on choosing quickly and jockeying for the desired activity and peer partners. This was primarily due to the use of a choice board which demanded that children choose only one activity from a set number of activities. In addition, there were usually only just enough activity slots on the choice board for each child in the classroom, and children were expected to keep their initial activity choice for the entire choice time period.

Helen's choice-making parameters differed. Helen did not use a choice board; Helen offered many more activity choices than the total number of children in the class; children could choose additional activities over the course of a single activity time. These three important factors created less pressure on the children to make a quick grab for the desired activity and peer partners. In effect, there was little need for children in Helen's classroom to "work the system" (Corsaro, 1985) to get what they wanted; 'what they wanted' was already built-in to the choice time event.

Permeable Boundaries

Two permeable boundaries, 'multiple choice-making' and 'free-flowing activity areas,' were also built-in elements in choice time which helped children participate successfully in the event. The permeable boundaries were not examples of children 'working the system' according to Corsaro's (1985) findings; Helen knew about the permeable boundaries and believed that they promoted successful and meaningful choice time participation. In addition, the permeable boundaries probably also accounted for the fact that I did not see the kind of hotly-contested entry rights Corsaro found in his study nor the fierce territoriality Goodenough discovered in her study.

Multiple choice-making involved the children could make second and third choices if space and materials were allowed. This enabled children to make additional selections if they: 1) became tired 2) completed a task 3) a friend left an activity 4) had problems working or interacting with a peer 5) achieved a certain sense of success and accomplishment or 6) Helen intervened and made a change. Allowing children to select additional activities meant that the children themselves controlled one participation parameter.

Opportunities for multiple choice-making involved selecting additional choices in one activity period. After lunch on December 14, for example, Nicole and Greg both decided to do *Math Rabbit* at the same computer. Nicole, though, quickly gained the upper hand in controlling the turn-taking, and Greg became frustrated and left. Nicole also lost interest and chose another activity.

> Greg: My turn now. You can't get a lot of turns.
> Nicole: Ok. (counts six icons on screen)
> Greg: I'm telling. You're not sharing.
> Nicole: Start it all over. I'm doing the other game. I'm gonna start with number one. Will you quit it? Ok. (Greg turns computer off) I didn't do it right. The Radio Shack.
> Greg: You're not taking turns. You're not taking turns.
> Nicole: Don't. (Nicole moves and Greg takes over on computer, but Nicole puts her hand on the keyboard.)
> Greg: Stop.
> Nicole: Do number two.
> Greg: Ok. (Chooses number five)
> Nicole: I'm not
> Greg: You want to make a change? (Calls out to another child passing by on the rug)
> Helen: (nearby) Are you finished there, Nicole?
> Nicole: Yes.
> Helen: Ok. (Another child, who had wanted to use the computer, comes over.)

Greg left the computer to play with a tub of manipulatives on the rug with another child. Nicole walked to the writing table, found her writing book from the small shelves containing all the children's books, and picked up a plastic pack of eight markers and started to write. This permeable boundary, the option to change activities after the initial activity choice, allowed the children to exercise a certain degree of control over their social and academic participation in choice time.

Free-flowing activity areas formed second permeable boundary. This involved children going back and forth during choice time between their official, designated activity choice and another activity area. When

children from more than one activity center interacted with each other, the children in effect got two activities for the price of one, and it was all kosher and carried out with Helen's implicit approval. While at times children stood by another center, chatting or observing peers, the best example of this pushing of spatial and participation boundaries occured between the playhouse and the hollow blocks. Helen knew of this permeable boundary, and while she never explicitly told the children it was permissible to cross over between the two activity areas, the children came to know over time that it was acceptable. For example, in the late spring, it became fashionable at the hollow block center to build a McDonalds and 'serve' food to passersby. The children's best customers were the members of the playhouse across the way. Helen thought it perfectly fine for house members to "come over to the McDonalds and order, and they can still retain their identity as members of the house family." Helen strengthened this social connection by writing a sign for the hollow block center with a "McDonalds" label. She thus encouraged a link between the activity areas and allowed children to participate with peers in two different centers, and also provided the children with practice and experience playing roles within two different activity areas at the same time.

Summary

Activity and small group time were the main ways Helen structured the choice time event. Helen organized and maintained choice time in accordance with her beliefs in the value of student choice, developmentally-grounded activity choices, and opportunities for talk and social interaction. In essence, choice time was 'child-run' — children selected their own activities, managed most of their academic work and

social interaction during the event, and had the power to make additional activity and peer partner choices once choice time got underway. In effect, Helen gave over a degree of initiative and control to the children, and this in itself was a guiding force in the unfolding of each choice time session.

The event's participation boundaries and permeable boundaries further served to facilitate successful and meaningful participation in choice time. One such participation parameter, which had Helen's explicit approval, was the stated and official maximum number of children allowed at a center. This parameter helped ensure a smooth running of an activity and decreased the chance of the children fighting over entry rights. One permeable boundary, which had Helen's tacit approval, involved the free-flowing area between hollow blocks and the playhouse. By pushing this boundary, children got two activities and more peer partners for the price of one.

Activity Framing

In this second major section, I discuss activity framing as an integral routine in the choice time event. As hinted at earlier, when I discussed the event's participation boundaries, the activity framing played a significant role in the detailed, daily ways that choice time was played out in Helen's classroom. Helen used the activity framing not only to invite and engage the chilren in the range of activity choices, but also to cajole, exhort, and guide children's social and academic learning in the day's activities, projects, concepts, and ideas. In discussing the interrelationship between choice time and the activity framing routine, I highlight the routine's purposes, parts and structure, specialized language, and elements varied.

Purposes

Helen used the activity framing to offer the children a range of activity choices and to emphasize certain aspects of literacy activities. Choice-making was one important purpose of the activity framing, and Helen used the framing to create a complex layering of choice-making possibilities. Helen believed in the benefits of encouraging kindergartners to choose activities and peer partners was an integral part of Helen's educational philosophies and a foundation for the children's academic and social participation. Helen stressed the importance of "real, meaningful choices" and for children to know the "alternatives in order to make choices." Helen also highlighted the value of children making choices "based on their understanding of the choice," for "this is where my teaching comes in and their learning comes in." Activity framing was the interactional routine for offering activity choices and for teaching the children about certain aspects and facets of litearcy activities across curricular areas.

Focus on literacy formed a second purpose. Helen used the activity framing to make two important connections to literacy teaching and learning which I call 'literacy overtures' and 'literacy over time.'

Literacy overtures were ways Helen invited children to choose from a variety of literacy-related activities across curricular areas. The overtures touched on activities ranging from the writing center to the library to the painting easels. Literacy overtures allowed Helen to create a complex web involving history of experience, manner, and content in regard to the full range of literacy activities. In regard to the element of time, for instance, Helen used the overtures to the overtures reach 'back' in the children's kindergarten history or experience resurrect 'old' activities, highlight

present or ongoing projects, 'one-time' as well as short and long-term activities, and foreshadow future activities. Given their complexity of use, the overtures were an integral way for Helen to make literacy involvement a dynamic, ongoing part of the overall social and academic life of the classroom.

Some overtures were directed to an entire activity, while others only related to one or two aspects of a project. For example, in one activity framing Helen offered a whole-class book of "I Can" pictures and text (things children could do like "swimming" or "swinging on the bars") as an activity choice. During another framing, Helen offered drawing and writing a card to accompany a Mother's Day present. In both instances, the literacy overture was directed toward the entire class with the expectation that a number of children might choose the activity either that day or sometime in the near future. The overtures were indeed overtures, put out for the children to think about and possibly choose, and not as a requirement.

'Literacy over time' involved using the activity framing to highlight or draw the children's attention to various aspects of literacy projects. For example, from the late spring to the end of the school year, the children dictated, illustrated, and participated in the full range of tasks associated with their own autobiographies. Helen offered this special end-of-kindergarten project as a continual small group choice, and over the course of several weeks Helen used the activity framing to call attention to certain aspects of process and product with the autobiographies. I discuss this more fully in the next section.

Although Helen used the activity framing to highlight literacy related projects, literacy activities were not presented as the key to success

in kindergarten and school. Rather, Helen used the activity framing to invite and engage children in the full range of activities and projects in the classroom — literacy and 'non-literacy' activities received equal billing. Helen did not consistently place literacy activities in the forefront of the activity framing, especially encourage or entice children into these activities, and rarely required children to choose a literacy project during a given choice time.

Parts and Structure

Although the activity framing differed each day, it followed a certain stable order and structure of four parts which Helen played with and modified over the course of the year. In this section, I highlight the second and fourth parts of the framing. Helen usually covered these four basic parts:

1) Announcement of Activity, Small Group, or Combined Time
2) Offering of activity choices
3) Special instructions regarding participation parameters
4) Highlighting aspects of projects and activities

First, after reading the morning news on the chalkboard, the children scooted back to their original places on the rug and Helen returned to her rocking chair and announced "activity time," "small group time," or a combination of the two activity periods. Second, Helen offered a smorgasboard of literacy and non-literacy related activity choices. This often took up a good deal of time. Third, Helen mentioned participation parameters pertinent to a certain center or material. Fourth, Helen discussed certain features of a project and shared a product. After these four parts, nested within the activity framing, the children then announced their activity choices during the dismissal routine.

Before highlighting the two parts in this section, I mention an important 'glue' to the activity framing — Helen's pacing and rhythm of the routine. Over the course of my eight months in her classroom, I was continually amazed at the careful, patient way Helen framed each day's activity times. Although the framing often took up to fifteen or more minutes at a time, Helen also kept up a lively, moving pace and all the while coating the framing through her tone of voice and certain repeated words and phrases.

Offering of Activity Choices

Helen used the activity framing to create a complex web of activity choices. For example, in an April 1 activity framing, Helen offered a one-time activity (egg dyeing), reintroduced an 'old' activity ('I Can' book) from the previous week, mentioned ongoing activities (like weaving) that might be still "unfinished," as well as offering 'old' or 'stock' choices (such as the listening center and house) available since October.

> Good. Now I want to see everyone looking over here. If you have already dyed eggs today put your hands on your head. Now if you did *not* have a turn yet, would put your hand *up* in the air so I can see it. If you did not have a turn, you didn't do *any* eggs at all, raise your hand. Now let's talk about what we're all going to do doing this work time and then we'll continue with the egg dying at the same time that other things are going on . . . Now I'd like you to think about what you would like to do . . . during this group time some people might want to work on listening center. Remember at the listening center today there is *Bunny Trouble* . . . Ok, remember that you may do more pages for this now (Helen holds up an 'I Can' book). If you'd like, we can add new pages and we can do more things to match (holds up another book) for the match book so the match book has all the ones that are done so far . . . if you'd like to add more pages in the match book, then you need to let me know because we need a special size for the paper, ok?
>
> Some people might work on their writing. Some people may work on weaving . Some people may work with blocks. Some people may work at the listening center. Some people might finger paint or draw. Some people may be part of the family in the house. Some people might want to work at the writing table. Some people might want to work with things in the cabinets like pattern blocks.

> Some people might want to work with things that they've started but not finished. Some people might have other ideas of things they want to do, like the new puzzle that we put out.

Helen thus used the activity framing routine to mix and match activity choices, keeping the children alert and interested in possible new (and reintroduced) activities as well as comforted and secure in the knowledge that standby choices were offered on a continual basis. The egg dyeing, for example, was a new activity offered only once all year. The 'I Can' book was repackaged as a 'new' activity. By suggesting children could "add new pages," "do more things to match," and use "special size paper," Helen brought new life to an 'old' activity and got more mileage out of the project.

On occasion, Helen made overtures within overtures. In a June 10 framing, Helen offered the choice of illustrating a xeroxed copy of the autobiographies — "If people want to do more pages, for a second book for me, you may." This overture was very much a real choice; Helen asked the class, "Is this something people *have* to do?" "No," responded the class. "Right," Helen replied. "Only if you want to do it. You can use the computer, look at the silkworm book . . . " and Helen continued the activity framing.

The stock choices Helen offered, such as drawing and "things from the cabinets like pattern blocks," also sometimes took on the feel of new or refurbished choices. For example, Helen rarely mentioned finger painting as a choice though it was a choice usually available. By offering finger painting on April 1, the activity came to life again and took on the air of being a new or at least somewhat new activity choice. In addition, Helen often ended the offering of activity choices by adding, "And if there is something that I have not mentioned that you would like to do, please let

me know." Although children rarely took up this offer, it meant that children had the option to choose 'new' activities Helen did not have time to mention.

As discussed earlier, although choice time was primarily child-run — and children participated in the activities alone, with a partner, a small group of peers — there were many activities in which children worked with adults. In a May 3 framing, Helen offered the choices of illustrating autobiographies and listening to 'Reading Roundup' books. Both tasks entailed some measure of adult assistance; an adult was briefly needed to read back the children's written text in their autobiographies, while an adult was needed to read an entire story for the Reading Roundup. These adult-assisted choices, though, were not given precedence over other independent, child-run activities; Helen offered these choices on a part with computers, pattern blocks, and weaving.

> Ok, let's see who's ready. Good. That's better. During this small group time some people may work on (i.e. illustrate) their stories (autobiographies). Some people might work in their writing books (i.e. at the writing center). Some people might be part of the group working on their horses (Reading Roundup) and Mrs. K., will you please work at the table with the people who want to do their horses, please and . . . boys and girls I want you to meet Irene she's here today to keep us company for a while longer, and Irene would you read stories today? Ok, Irene will read stories for people who want to hear more stories. Be sure you write down the name of the story so we can put it on your list (i.e. Reading Roundup list). Some people might want to do pattern blocks. Some people might want to do listening center. There's *one* person at listening center (includes filmstrip). Two people might want to do computer. Some people might have weaving that's not finished that they might want to work on this morning.

The offer of the autobiographies, although all the children were eventually expected to illustrate their pages, was presented as a choice on a par with pattern blocks and computers. Those children who at that point

had not finished their illustrating did not have to choose autobiographies on that particular morning; it therefore remained an 'open' choice like all the others.

Highlighting Aspects of Literacy Activities

As hinted at in the above examples, and as foreshadowed in the previous chapter, literacy and 'non-literacy' related activities were not separated out in the activity framing. Literacy-based tasks and projects did not always come first or last in the framing, nor were they emphasized in favor of other activities. Rather, Helen presented the full range of activities and projects as possible choices on an equal footing. As mentioned in the section on the purposes of the activity framing, literacy overtures and literacy over time played important roles in guiding the children's participation in the literacy activities.

Literacy Overtures

Helen used the literacy overtures to enrich the overall choice-making possibilities in the choice time event. For instance, when Helen made an overture to reintroduce an 'old' activity initiated weeks or months earlier, or when she repackaged one of the basic ongoing activity choices, this added an extra element of choice and interest for the children. It prevented activities from getting stale, and gave the real impression of literacy was an evolving, dynamic force in the daily life of choice time and the classroom in general.

For example, in the already mentioned April 1 activity framing, Helen offered *Bunny Trouble* at the listening center. By offering a filmstrip, not usually part of the listening center, Helen added a twist to the a stock choice. Helen made other literacy overtures in the same framing. Helen presented the 'I Can' book as a literacy choice by offering

children the chance to "add more pages." In the next literacy overture, Helen displayed a matching book and suggested that "we can do more things to match . . . if you'd like to add more pages in the match book, then you need to let me know because we need a special size for the paper, ok?" The next overture was that "some people might work on their writing" at one of the tables. In offering these literacy activities, all sandwiched in between the choices of egg dyeing and weaving, Helen used literacy overtures to expose, rather than require nor nudge, the children to literacy-related activities.

Helen sometimes used the framing to make literacy overtures of the same basic activity over the course of several weeks or months. The 'I Can' book, for example, was first introduced in the winter, reintroduced in February, and introduced yet again on April 1. On February 15, Helen presented the book and offered it as a 'new' activity choice.

> Helen: I found a project from a long time ago and some people didn't finish. A long time ago we started to do stories about things we can do (holds up sheet on a clipboard). There's space here for a picture and room at the bottom for writing. You can dictate to an adult and they'll do the writing for you, or you can do the writing yourself. You have a choice. (Pointing to the sheet) On top it says 'I Can.' I'll show you one. It says, 'I can ride a horse. I can swim in deep water. I can jump rope. But I can't snap my fingers. Can you?' Do you remember when we talked about hard and easy stories? We said that easy things are things we know how to do and how hard things are things we don't know how to do. But these things change. I know how to drive a car; that's easy for me because I've been living for a long time. Other things I can't do—
> Greg: Like fixing a car?
> Helen: (overlapping with Greg) Like fixing a car. I take it to the service station.

In reintroducing an old choice like the 'I Can' book, Helen often used the activity framing to remind children about the content and procedural parameters of the activity. In these situations, the literacy overture had to

be expanded to include additional information children needed both to choose the activity initially, and once the project was chosen, to participate successfully and with a sense of accomplishment.

In offering the 'I Can' book as a 'new' choice, Helen used the activity framing to re-explain the project on several simultaneous levels: 1) a general statement framing the project and drawing on the collective memory or history of the class — "A long time ago we started to do stories about things we can do." 2) informing how to manipulate the graphics of the sheet — "there's space here for a picture and room at the bottom for writing" 3) giving options for the participation parameters — "You can dictate to an adult and they'll do the writing for you, or you can do the writing yourself." 4) sharing an example from the book — "It says, 'I can ride a horse. I can swim in deep water." 5) reviewing the gist of the project — "We said that easy things are things we know how to do and how hard things are things we don't know how to do." and 6) extending the project orally — "But these things change. I don't know how to drive a car . . . Other things I can't do . . . ," to which Greg replied, "Like fixing a car?"

Literacy Over Time

The second literacy-related focus of the framing involved offering a long-term literacy project as a choice and guiding the children's attention to aspects of a literacy activity extended over time. For example, the children worked on their autobiographies from late April up until the last week of school. While I do not have data on Helen's initial framing of the autobiographies or "stories," Helen devote several activity framings to the

project. The autobiographies were an important end-of-the-year project, and Helen played up the project in the activity framing as well as in the morning news.

Helen used the activity framing routine to offer the autobiographies as a choice and to emphasize the importance of creating a thoughtful, well-made autobiography. The project took several weeks because Helen offered it as a choice, not a requirement, and wanted children to take their time and participate with care in all phases of the project: 1) the initial framing of the activity 2) dictating the text, 3) Helen's sharing of autobiographies in progress, 4) choosing paper for the cover and helping put the book together with a binding machine 5) learning about a title page 6) illustrating the text page by page with "special project" marker pens 7) illustrating Helen's xeroxed copies and 8) selecting wrapping paper and ribbon, making a card, and taking the books home as presents for the chilren's families. Extending such an activity over several weeks enabled Helen to use the activity framing to comment on various aspects of the autobiographies as they unfolded. And since the children worked on the task at their own pace, Helen could draw on stories in varying stages of completion. On May 3, Helen used the framing to appraise the evolving stories.

> Helen: I want you to think about which of those things you want to work on, and while you're doing that I want to talk to you a little bit about the stories. The stories are wonderful. I have many more of them now printed and ready *but not* everybody's because not everybody has done their story yet . . . and this is Andrew's. Andrew has all of his pages (i.e. text typed on loose sheets) in here (manila folder), but he hasn't started working on it yet. Andrew's pages are all here ready for him to work on. Does that mean that when Andrew works, he has to do it all at one time?
>
> Class: No.

> Helen: No, you know this is a big job and you want to do it *carefully*. People get tired, so that is why you have the folder so that you can do a page or two and then put them in the folder and work on something else. You can work on your book another day. You don't need to do all pages at one time . . . and we have brand-new pens, for special projects, that we can use. Ok, think about where you're going to work.

This framing occured in early May, a few weeks after starting the project, and the project continuec until the middle of June. At this point, about a third of the way along, Helen informed the children that she had "many more of them (stories) printed and ready (for illustrating) but not everybody's because not everybody has done their story yet." Helen then showed Andrew's loose pages with the typed text as an example of material ready to be illustrated. Although his pages were ready to go, Helen did not require Andrew to choose illustrating or if he did choose the activity, to illustrate all the pages — "Does that mean that when Andrew works, he has to do it all at one time?" to which the class responded with a resounding "No." Helen elaborated on the children's freedom not to work on all their pages by explaining, "This is a big job and you want to do it carefully . . . do a page or two . . . and you can work on your book another day."

This is a good example of Helen's use of the activity framing to extend literacy over time — to save it for "another day." It allowed Helen to point out the diverse ways that children approached the activity, some children had finished their texts and some didn't, in terms of choosing it relative to all the other activity choices. It also enabled the children to see the process of the autobiographies carried out over time, and that when Andrew for instance, saw a need 'to do' his autobiography, it would be

there for him. (Andrew did not choose his stories on that day; he chose the computer.)

Helen also used the framing to orient the children toward certain features of the literacy project. On the same May 3 framing, after mentioning Andrew's story, Helen discussed specific points regarding issues of process and product.

Helen: This (autobiography) one is *partly* done and I think this one belongs to A. This is Mike's story and he started working (illustrating the text) on Friday so he has two pages finished. This one (looks at page in a new folder) I wanted to show you. This I almost forgot is an extra page. We printed another one of these because *I* forgot to *tell* the person who was working on this book that when you do your illustrations, it's important not to do them over on this side (shows left side) because, remember, this is the side where the binding goes and it will go right into the picture and you won't be able to see it all. So the picture should go in here so that the binding will not go over it. What I did was I replaced this with another finished page.

Mike: Whose was that?

Helen: I think that was Lori's (looking at books in her lap). Now this is *my* copy of Amanda's story and I will put mine on colored paper and laminate it too but I don't need to do mine today. Only Amanda's copy that she's taking home with her is going today (Amanda is leaving school). And that says (slowly reading cover) 'Amanda's Story.'

Hakim: Amanda.

Helen: Amanda's story. Yes, Hakim. Her name starts with an 'A.' You're really noticing a lot Hakim. That's good.

Sarah: And also Amy.

Helen: And also Amy. Right. Now there were some people who needed extra pages of some of them. There was one person (books and folders fall out of her lap). Ah, thank you. Thank you (children assist).

Helen: Oh my Lord (more folders fall). Ok. I'm not going to go through each book now, but I want you to know that if you have ***already*** dictated your story then ***all*** your papers are here. So you if you decide to start working on them, you may, and we have brand new pens so we'll be ready for us to use the pens that are for special projects. Ok, think about where you're going to work.

In this section of the framing, Helen presented a number of aspects of the project one right after the other: 1) the present state of Mike's story — "he has two pages finished" 2) the proper way to illustrate the cover — "I forgot to tell the person who was working on this book that when you do your illustrations, it's important not to do them over on this side (left) because . . . this is where the binding goes" 3) a copy of Amanda's story to be completed with the final stages of "colored paper" and to be "laminated" 4) reading of Amanda's title page 5) general instruction regarding an important step in the process — "if you have already dictated your story then all your papers are here" and 6) offering "brand new pens" for "special projects" for those ready to illustrate their text. These instructions and bits of information focused the children's attention on certain conventions of the project, like illustrating the cover in a certain way, as well as highlighting the evolving and extended nature of the activity through the sharing various stages of the stories.

Three days later, on May 6, Helen again used the activity framing to emphasize the extended nature of the project as well as highlight certain stages of the process.

> Helen: Ok. I want to show you work in progress (samples of the autobiographies) is on the table. So books that people are working on are on the table, but I have *two* here that are finished. There's another one where the pages are finished, but I want to show you this is the first one that's come this far. Remember Kimberly was all done except for one page, and I needed to get that page out of my printer, and now we have that page. So as soon as you put a backing on this page, then we'll be ready for putting Kimberly's book in the laminator. I thought you wanted to see how it's going to look. This is the cover (shows).
>
> It says Kimberly's Story , by Kimberly _____, Kindergarten 103, ____ School. And then here's the first page. It says . . . (Helen reads the entire book) Kimberly, it's a lovely story. It's going to be a great book. Ok, so S's is *almost*

> ready for the laminator. She's needing backing (piece of colored construction paper) for one page and in Kimberly's book (folder) is another set of her pages. So that sometime when Kimberly has time and feels like it, I'm hoping she'll make a set for me. And Kimberly, I wanted to ask you a question about your first page.
>
> It's a wonderful one, but I want you to decide whether you wanted this one (holds up) or whether you wanted one where the drawing doesn't come down quite so far (drawing partially obscures title)? You think about it before we laminate it, ok? (Kimberly nods) And if you need another page two, there's one under here. (Helen goes on to share Sarah's story.)

Helen used this framing to build on some of the information presented three days earlier. For instance, Helen explicitly called the stories "works in progress" and pointed out the display of these books on the table. She then shared Kimberly's "finished pages," holding the loose papers and reading the title page and text to the class almost as if it were a real book. This was not a sharing of a completely finished autobiography, but an example of a story that had reached an important point in the overall course of the project. Kimberly had illustrated and decorated the title page and all the pages of the text, all the pages but one had been glued onto construction paper "backing," and "it was *almost* ready for the laminator."

So, Helen used the framing to touch on the conventional elements of the autobiographies, such as illustrating the title page and leaving room for the binding, as well as sharing the actual content of the text and pictures through reading Kimberly's story on May 6. By highlighting various stages of "works-in-progress" in this and other activity framings, Helen foreshadowed certain facets of the project. This retained an ongoing, evolving feel to the project and engaged the children's interest both within the activity framing, their choice-making, and their actual involvement in choice time.

Summary

The activity framing in Helen's classroom was an example of an important interactional routine. It followed a certain basic, stable pattern and served an important function in terms of the daily playing out of the choice event. The two parts highlighted in this section pertained to the offering of activity choices and the highlighting of aspects of literacy projects and activities. Helen used the activity framing to create a sophisticated web of activity choices that played on elements of time, manner, experience, and content in the tasks. In a second way, Helen made use of literacy overtures and highlighting aspects of literacy projects extended over time as two important ways to influence the children's choice-making and their participation in literacy activities.

Specialized Language

In the activity framing, Helen used a degree of specialized language to draw the children's attention to both literacy and non literacy-related activities.

Language of Invitation

First, an integral, built-in element of both instances of activity framing involved the 'language of invitation' Helen used. Helen started the May 3 framing by saying that "some people might work" and "might be part of the group working on their horses." In this other framings, Helen frequently included a high number of 'invitation' words like "might," "want," "may." These words, repeated over an entire activity framing, created a subtle, warm invitation to the children in a different way than if Helen had said, "Please choose from this and this and this" or "Please choose this activity or that activity."

Second, and this element was closely related to this 'language of invitation,' Helen kept up a lively, moving pace to her activity framing, coating the framing through her tone of voice, pacing, and the alliterative way she repeated certain words and phrases. For example, on May 3 and on other occasions, Helen repeated a stock of phrases — "some people may work on," "some people might choose," or "some people might want to do," "some people might have" — over the entire course of the activity framing. And if Helen diverged from listing the choices to discuss a certain element of an activity, or if there was an unexpected interruption of some sort, Helen slipped back into the rhythm, pacing, and precise wording of the framing without missing a beat.

A third instance of specialized language involved specific reference to aspects of a certain project. For example, as discussed above, Helen used a range of words and phrases in the autobiography project. Helen referred to the stories as "works-in-progress," and used other 'special' terms such as "autobiography," "dictate," "title page," "illustrate," "laminate," "bind," "folder," "sheets," "copy," "finished page." Helen exposed the children to these terms within the specific context of the project, and often used the activity framing to discuss the project and use these terms as she shared an actual product.

Elements Varied

For the most part, the activity framing followed a stable, consistent order both in terms of when it occured during the daily schedule and in how it unfolded over time. Certain elements, like the offering of specific activity choices and the combining of activity and small group time did vary.

Choices

Helen continually changed, modified, and added to the basic stock of activity choices. On March 1, Helen framed the upcoming activity time, listing 'old' choices children were quite familiar with, and adding a twist to one of these activities as well as presenting an added, ongoing activity as yet another option.

> Helen: During this activity time, some people might want to use pattern blocks, or solid blocks, or the house, or the computer, or the listening center. Some people might want to paint. Some people might want to go to the writing table. Some people might want to wait to do the estimating. Some people might want to choose to write on the beautifully decorated paper that we have. Some people might want to take care of checking out their butterfly books (home reading program) . . . Some people might want to work on measuring themselves and coloring in their strips to go on the door, on the graph on the door. There are a number of people who have finished that, did you notice? . . . (Continuing after a long aside on letting Honey Bunny out into the classroom) Ok, now some people might have some ideas of things you may want to write already and this is a time when you can write *anything* you want to write; it doesn't have to be what everybody else is doing because this is not a writing project. You write on paper or in your writing book . . . Ok, please think about where you're going to work and we'll start right away.
> Mike: Can we use pattern blocks?
> Helen: That's a possibility (as Helen shuffles the name cards). Mix them up and we'll see who's ready.
> Lori: and you might be first.
> Helen: I don't know. We'll see.

Combining Activity and Small Group Time

Later on in the year, when Helen saw that the children could handle it, she started combining the two activity times when the situation demanded.

"Sometimes I combine them," Helen explained, "if there is not enough time for two distinct times. I then establish with the children to choose at least one small group time activity and one activity time choice and the

period would be longer. They now have the pattern down now, and so I don't have to change halfway through an activity time."

Returning to the morning of May 20, Helen sat back down in her chair after playing Simon Says. It was time for Helen to frame the children's activity choice time. Helen's choice times were divided into "small group time" and "activity time." Helen started these two activity times back in the middle of October when Helen felt the were "ready for it." Helen told me what she says to her class, "We're going to have two activity times now because you're really doing well and you're ready. We'll have one activity time that we call 'small group time' and another activity that's a regular activity time."

Summary

Helen organized the overall structure of choice time into activity time and small group time. The choice time event composed the bulk of the children's academic and social time together in kindergarten. As such a paramount event, it thus carried out important curricular and socialization goals for Helen. For instance, in accordance with Helen's belief in the value of student choice, the children were given ample opportunities to choose from a wide variety of activity choices and accompanying social configurations. In addition, the children's successful participation in choice time was aided through certain participation parameters and permeable boundaries. For instance, Helen's limited certain centers to a set maximum number of children discouraged children from fighting over entry rights to a center area.

The activity framing routine played an imporant role in the daily unfolding of activity and small group time. The routine served such important purposes as offering the range of activity choices and focusing the children's attention on literacy projects. The structure of the activity framing routine was composed of four basic parts. In using the routine to offer a diversity of activity choices, Helen created a complex web of choices that touched on elements of time, experience, content, and procedural parameters. In terms of the relationship of the framing to literacy activities, Helen used the framing to interest children in choosing literacy tasks as well as to call their attention to certain aspects of such activities. Helen did this through literacy overtures and literacy projects extended over time. In all her focusing on literacy activities across curricular areas, though, Helen did not place such activities above other non-literacy tasks. Reference to literacy participation in the literacy framing, then, was very much in the overall spirit of choice time where literacy and non-literacy activities received equal billing.

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